

Is Talent Overrated?

A Master Class presented at The Curtis Institute of Music

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Researchers in the areas of business, sports and the arts are starting to question the idea and importance of “innate talent.” Two recently published books that focus on current research regarding high level performance are ***Talent is Overrated*** by Geoff Colvin, and ***Outliers*** by Malcolm Gladwell. Below are some excerpts from these books that can be applied to achievement in the area of winning an orchestral audition.

“The vast majority of prodigies, as far as we can tell, don’t grow up to be great performers. A few do, but most don’t maintain the intensely focused daily work for the many years necessary to achieve at the highest levels. Conversely, the people who do become top-level achievers are rarely child prodigies.” TIO pg 197

“In the largest and most famous examination of the topic, the legendary educational researcher Benjamin S. Bloom directed a study of 120 young men and women who were among America’s top performers in widely divergent fields-piano playing, sculpting, swimming, tennis, mathematics, and neurology. After extensive interviews, his team found that their home environments shared a number of traits. To excel, to do one’s best, to work hard, and to spend one’s time constructively were emphasized over and over again.” TIO pg 172

“Going beyond the question of specific innate gifts (talent), even the general abilities that we typically believe characterize the greats are not what we think. In many realms-chess, music, business, medicine-we assume that the outstanding performers must possess staggering intelligence or gigantic memories. Some do, but many do not. The factor that seems to explain the most about great performance is something the researchers call deliberate practice.” TIO pg6

“Deliberate practice is characterized by several elements....it is an activity designed specifically to improve performance, it can be repeated a lot, feedback on results is continuously available, it’s highly demanding mentally and physically, and it isn’t much fun.” TIO pg 66

“The emerging picture from studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert-in anything” OL pg 40

“Practice is not the thing you do once you are good. It’s the thing that makes you good” OL pg42

“As a matter of fact, the evidence suggests that after a certain amount of talent, talent doesn’t matter. It is at that level that hard work matters most”

“Above all, what the evidence shouts most loudly is striking, liberating news: that great performance is not reserved for a preordained few. It is available to you and to everyone” TIO pg 206

No Man who wakes before the sun rises will fail to be rich- Chinese Proverb